

I interned for Smithsonian Libraries at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) in Washington D.C. during Alternative Spring Break 2017. Sara Cardello, the Education Specialist, supervised Kelly Thompson and me for the week, and together we assisted with the online educational tool, *I See Wonder*. Supported by the Smithsonian Learning Lab, a digital platform, *I See Wonder* is designed to assist k-12 educators spark student interest in online collections. Essentially, the learning tool provides students with digitized images accompanied by a brief summary, also called “educational notes,” of what is pictured, which Kelly and I edited and revised over the course of the week.

On Monday, March 13th, I attended an event hosted by Smithsonian Libraries called “Will Work For Books: Navigating the Job Market of Rare Book Librarianship,” a brown bag session featuring a panel of four librarians with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. My main takeaway from the panel was how to better market myself as a librarian.

Erin Rushing scheduled three tours of various library facilities within the Natural History museum for the ASB 2017 interns for Wednesday, March 16th. Our first stop was at the Conservation Annex, where we met with book conservator, Katie Wagner, who explained to us what a typical workflow looks like for her and how she became a book conservator. Next, we took a tour of the Joseph F. Cullman 3rd library of Natural History, led by rare books curator, Leslie Overstreet. Lastly, we met with digital collections librarian, Jackie Chapman, to tour the Scanning Room and discuss the Biodiversity Heritage Library’s partnership with the Internet Archive.

I was fortunate enough to accompany Cindy Parker at the Hirshhorn Museum’s Yayoi Kusuma Exhibit on Thursday, March 14th. This exhibit was one of the non-library oriented highlights of my trip, aside from meeting Kyle Mooney, a current SNL cast member, in the cafeteria at the National Gallery of Art. Later on Thursday afternoon, the ASB interns and I joined Erin Rushing at the Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology at the National Museum of American History. Head librarian, Lilla Vekerdy, gave us a tour and showed us “treasures” from Dibner’s collection, like *Euclid’s Elements*, a first-edition of *Wonder Woman*, and Copernicus’ *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies*.

The most moving experience I had whilst on this trip was at the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum, where Kelly and I accompanied our supervisor, Sara, for an event called “Indoor Recess.” Sara collaborated with acquisitions curator, Kyra Schuster, to tell the story of Kiki the monkey puppet during a luncheon, where we made finger puppets of our own. The story of Kiki is summarized in this [video](#). This concrete example of how something as simple as a monkey puppet can connect the dots for people demonstrated the power of archives and special collections materials. Getting to connect the dots for people like Kyra did is why I do this. Rest assured, I think I’m in the right field.

William E. Burchfield, II

National Library of Medicine – Improve Automated Gene Pages on Genetics Home Reference Project

This year, 2017, I participated in Alternative Spring Break by working at the National Library of Medicine. The NLM is the largest biomedical library in the world and interning there was a dream come true. During my time there I identified and assessed web-based resources about genes and gene-disease relationships for the Genetics Home Reference website (<https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/>). These resources will be used to improve the content and structure of pages about genes on Genetics Home Reference. Genetics Home Reference is the NLM resource for consumer information about genetic conditions and the genes or chromosomes related to those conditions. The website currently provides more than 1,300 gene summaries curated by staff members. The site has an additional 2,200+ gene pages populated automatically. These “automated” gene pages are the ones that my two colleagues and I worked to improve. We were also able to provide other information that should prove useful not only to the automated pages but to the curated pages as well.

I was able to put my prior learning to use during this project. Using my searching skills to find online resources for genetic information that could be used to improve a resource for millions of people around the world means a lot to me and is one of the reasons I chose to participate in this project. The project was led by the director of Genetics Home Reference, Stephanie Morrison. Working with her and her team was an amazing experience. I was also able to meet with Kathel Dunn, the Associate Fellowship Coordinator, who was able to provide invaluable advice for not only the week but also for possible future endeavors there. The relationships I formed while working on this important project are irreplaceable.

I would recommend to anyone that is considering participating in Alternative Spring Break to please do so. The experience is truly amazing and can be powerful, even life changing, if you allow it to be.

In library work, we don't always see the fruits of our efforts. We help customers track down grants for their small businesses, produce a selection of books for a young reader, or collaborate with researchers to solve a tricky chronology question, but we don't always know what's it's for. The customer doesn't always come back to us and thank us for our work or credit us for our effort. We still value what we do, but there can be a sense of disconnection.

My week interning at the Smithsonian Libraries was completely the opposite. For a week, I worked full-time in the main library branch at the Natural History Museum researching and writing descriptions for their Adopt-a-Book program. I got to learn about this amazing program and how it directly helps the library raise funds. I got to handle their collection, touching books that were over a hundred years old and researching authors who have long been out of vogue. My colleagues were a delight, always willing to answer my questions, to encourage me to explore their vast collections, and giving me behind-the-scene tours. From them, I learned how dedicated the staff of the Smithsonian is. I was amazed to see them do so much with so little.

I currently work in a public library, and one of our main jobs is to create a community. This doesn't mean that we staff members aren't a part of the community, but we can feel a little distant. We can't fully immerse ourselves in the community because we're tending to it. During my week at the Smithsonian, I was a member of the community. I was a member of an organization whose focus was on the information and the public good. We served the public by guarding, preserving, organizing, advertising, and researching the information. We helped the public by helping our colleagues, the museums, and the libraries. I can say without hyperbole that it was one of the most soothing and satisfying experiences of my life.

Prior to this internship, I had planned on being an Outreach Librarian at a public library, but now I'm torn. In academic and special libraries, there are numerous outreach opportunities, and the potential to help the public is just as high. However, in the former you have greater opportunities to serve information and become an expert. You can immerse yourself in research and truly become a member of the community. This is a side of librarianship I have never experienced and was not sure I'd particularly like. I had erroneously assumed it would be sedentary, solitary work that would leave me feeling isolated and unwanted. I am happy to have been proved wrong and grateful that the Smithsonian Libraries and University of Kentucky chose me for this internship.

I fully enjoyed my experience at the National Library of Medicine. I worked with Erin Zellers and completed publisher reviews. To be honest, I was unsure of what I would do for an entire week and I was worried that it was just going to be busy work. However, I felt that I contributed to this project. I completed five reviews of different publishers throughout the week. I also attended meetings and went on tours throughout the National Institute of Health Campus. My favorite tour was going through the History of Medicine at NLM.

One thing I really enjoyed about interning at NLM was that I was able to see a different side of health science libraries. There is so much more you can do within this field than just reference or sitting at the desk. I also enjoyed getting advice from other librarians and fellows on my resume and career paths. Everyone was so helpful and wanted me to succeed with all of my future endeavors. I also felt that I was a part of team while I was there, everyone treated me as a colleague rather than an intern or assistant. It was such a beneficial experience for my future career goals because I was able to make contacts within the health science community at a national level.

On a personal level, I think that this experience taught me to not be afraid to try something different. My background is mostly in archives so I was unsure if I would like doing publisher reviews at NLM. However, I enjoyed working with everyone and I found my work to be really interesting. Reviewing publishers felt similar to a puzzle or mystery which is something I really enjoyed so in the end it was a perfect fit! This was such an amazing experience and I would recommend it to anyone who has the opportunity to go. I know that what I learned at NLM will help me both personally and professionally and I hope that I have the opportunity to be a part of the Alternative Spring Break Program again next year!

Blog posts

I began my week at the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda with a welcome reception on Monday, gaining insight into the organization and a chance to share my experience, and the type of project I worked on while there. At the NLM, I worked on the following project: Improving annotated gene pages, by researching additional material, incorporating it into their existing information on these pages. These pages have chromosomal and genetic information about different genes, as well as an expansive collection of information about rare diseases.

Through my time on this project, I found that they had done a great job to collect the best materials available from similar agencies that have also collected this information. During the week, I realized that although the website needs information for consumers that is at their level (rather than the level of scientists and researchers) little information truly exists that is truly consumer focused. One of the main challenges I found in looking for consumer information was that the websites I found were outdated or profiting from commercial advertising, two crucial challenges that NLM made clear to avoid in their selection criteria for external links added to the website.

Unfortunately, we faced a small setback on Tuesday when the snowstorm came to Bethesda. We were all asked to work from home, as NLM was closed. I continued my research for material that presented genetic information in a consumer-friendly fashion. I did make some headway in searching, finding a database that had recognized at least 800 genes that might be implicated in Autism Spectrum Disorders, and met the selection criteria.

Additionally, our whole group went on a tour of NLM and a tour of the Clinical Hospital. Both tours were interesting, and I learned more about what NLM does and the work and mission of the NIH. I was really glad to see the diversity of the patient populations that they serve, and how hard they work to make patients' stays comfortable.

The final day of the experience allowed me to recognize the importance of the Genetic Home Reference and how sometimes, this information may be the only information that some marginalized populations may have access to. Even if they can have access to other resources, it is critical that the information be correct and presented in an interesting way that is also easily understood. However, I also mentioned that lower-literacy or illiterate populations like those in the Appalachian region may struggle to use this information because it may not be understandable for them. Ultimately, we decided that it should be the job of doctors to help them to understand this information, as adding a set of low-literacy pages to the website would be very expensive and may not be heavily used.

I wish we could have had the lunch with the fellows, and talk with them about their experience, but because of the weather, we were unable to do that.

To anyone on the fence about the experience, it is very worth your while, especially if you have never been to D.C or NLM. It provides you with an interesting look at the importance of NLM and its work with the NIH, and can also help your resume. Also, they have a fellowship program that is definitely worth applying to, and can strengthen your overall experience.

Reflection on Alternative Spring Break 2017

I spent my Alternative Spring Break interning at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in the Textual Processing Section at the Archives II facility (College Park, MD). I supported a project to process records from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The collection includes 43 boxes of EPA comments on proposed federal rulemakings and actions during the 1970s and 1980s. The goal of the processing project is to create a file unit list of the collection, documenting the control number, federal agency subject to comment, date, and description of the contents for each folder. My support included cross-checking an electronic list of control numbers against the folders to identify any missing or out of order folders or control numbers and to enter the date and title/description for each folder. The completed file unit list will be used to create catalog records for the collection so the records will be discoverable and accessible to researchers. I was given a target of completing the processing tasks for five boxes by the end of the week and was happy to finish nine, making measureable progress on the large undertaking.

While the tasks were primarily data entry and confirmation, the project activities and context were helpful in learning about the NARA processing approach and procedures. Because of the enormous volume of records that NARA has to process and make available to researchers, their level of processing, preservation, and description is lower than what typically happens at smaller archives. After having learned about the “more product, less process” approach in LIS 643, it was interesting to see the idea at work in the real world.

In addition to working, I and the other NARA interns were fortunate enough to participate in a meet-and-greet with the Archivist of the United States and go on three tours during our ASB week, including a tour of the National Archives Museum in Washington, DC,

and tours of the conservation lab and reading room at Archives II. The tours were such a special experience and also educational in seeing different areas of the archives field.

I was undecided about my LIS focus when I began applying for MLIS programs. I selected the UK program based on a number of factors and was happy with my decision once I began working through the program. However, I decided after a couple semesters that I wanted to focus on archives. Because UK doesn't have an archives track and offers limited archives courses, this internship was a wonderful opportunity for me to get some practical exposure to career options in archives, both through the work I supported and the unique opportunity to observe, interact with, and talk with a number of archivists, learning about their current roles as well as their varied previous experiences and professional paths. Personally, the experience was fascinating and enjoyable, but the professional insight was absolutely invaluable and has cemented my desire to pursue a career in archives.

Taryn Kramer
Alternative Spring Break 2017 Reflection

While the rest of my peers worked within the National Library of Medicine itself, I was assigned to the FaceMatch project on the 10th floor of Lister Hill, the building in which the National Center for Biotechnology Information is located. After a briefing on the FaceMatch program and People Locator from my project sponsor Mike Gill and program leader Eugene Borovikov, I set to work on facial annotation. The FaceMatch program is meant to aid in locating missing persons during disaster response. They have a large database of annotated adult faces, but were lacking in faces of children. My task would be to annotate children's faces culled from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) website. This meant that I would be marking primary features on faces: eyes, noses, mouths, and, in some cases, ears. We had a brief interruption in the middle of the first day for a demonstration of the large scanners in the basement of the NLM.

We were told we didn't need to come in on Tuesday due to the snow storm in the DC area, so I continued to work on annotation on the laptop I had been permitted to take home. On Wednesday, all students were given a tour of the National Library of Medicine by one of the associate fellows. She walked us through both NLM and Lister Hill, imparting facts on the history and organization of the library while we grilled her on the process of becoming a fellow. At the History of Medicine Division, we were shown some old documents, including a letter written by George Washington, and a Nobel Prize awarded to Marshall Nirenberg. The rest of the day was spent working on our projects. On Thursday, we were given a tour of the NIH Clinical Center, a large research hospital. Because it's a hospital, we weren't taken into any patient or laboratory areas, but our tour guide shared a lot of facts about the history and operation of the hospital. The rest of the day and all of Friday was devoted to working on our projects.

My project seems to have been very different from the projects to which my peers were assigned. It was geared much more toward information science rather than library science. To my knowledge, the people with whom I worked on the FaceMatch project were all scientists, with no librarians. At first, I struggled to see what this project had to do with libraries, but I soon realized that biomedicine and biotechnology are crucial to the advancement of medicine, and who better to organize and store this information and bring it to medical professionals than librarians? The most valuable thing I learned this week was that library and information science extends past the walls of the library. It helped me come to the realization that I would like to work in a multidisciplinary field, combining LIS with other specialties to generate a greater impact.

My Alternative Spring Break project at the National Library of Medicine was beneficial to me in several ways. First, I got to meet several employees at NLM who were my supervisors for the week. Each had their own emphasis of study, and to a certain extent, I could see how each colleague's personality and interests contributed to the overall productivity of the lab group. My project dealt with the Genetics Home Reference (GHR) website maintained by NLM. This website maintains an informative page for each human gene that has a known association with a health condition. However, there are thousands of such genes, so NLM's team of 4-5 persons cannot write a page for every single one. So, for the lesser-known genes, they maintained an automated webpage. The automated webpage uses an API (Application Programming Interface- something I had never heard of before) to legally extract data from other websites without human intervention. Every automated webpage has a disclaimer that the data has been pulled from another website, and that the editors of GHR have not had a chance to check it for accuracy. Two fellow UK LIS students and I were assigned to search for more websites which the GHR automated pages could pull from. Whatever we found had to comply with NLM's criteria for source inclusion (non-commercial, accessible using standard technologies, curated by reliable persons, etc.). I think this project did help reinforce my source evaluation skills. We did not find a "silver bullet" source which contained novel information in a suitable format which had been curated by others and was just waiting to be included. In some respects, this was actually a good thing, because it confirmed that the NLM researchers had not somehow missed a perfect resource. We found that the information on lesser-known genes and conditions was highly technical. Not surprising, but meaning that such information was not decipherable by clinicians or any other non-geneticist user of GHR. This project was related to another interesting ongoing project by the GHR team: a user-experience analysis of their website. During a meeting, my supervisors discussed recently collected mouse-click data (from an "analytics" program, which I had only vaguely heard of before) which showed that some parts of the website were more heavily used than others. One of my fellow LIS students figured out why people were clicking on the non-interactive text portions of each webpage: they were highlighting the text to copy and paste it, and our analytics program was picking up their initial mouse-clicks. Overall, the reason I liked the ASB program was that it immersed me in a library & information science "environment", and I picked up many diverse bits of knowledge about everyday life in the LIS workplace.

-Steve Pfeiffer ('18 ?)

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It was an honor to be selected as a participant for the University of Kentucky's Alternative Spring Break program at the Smithsonian Libraries in Washington, DC. I have been interested in participating since I began the MLIS program and it fulfilled my expectations as a personally and professionally enriching opportunity.

I was stationed in the office of Advancement with the Public Affairs Officer for the Smithsonian Libraries, Liz O'Brien. The Advancement office handles marketing, public relations, and fundraising for the libraries. I applied for this area specifically as it melded well with my professional experience as a marketer. My project was to create a marketing plan for an upcoming Smithsonian Libraries exhibit: "Cultivating America's Gardens." The exhibit opens in May at the National Museum of American History and will run for one year. There is more of a marketing budget for this exhibit than with previous exhibits as it has received corporate sponsorship and underwriting from Burpee Seed Company. The exhibit will showcase old seed catalogs and tools and cover the trends and hallmarks of America's Gardens throughout the decades. I was very pleased to be able to suggest some marketing tactics to drive interest and attendance to the exhibit upon opening.

I learned a great deal from this experience. There are 21 different Smithsonian Libraries and before the program I was unclear on how they were structured and utilized by the research groups and/or public. I now better understand that they are accessed primarily through the dedicated Smithsonian research groups and why. For example, we visited the Cullman Library in the Natural History Museum. The knowledge there is so unique and specialized and we spoke with the head curator of that library and rare books. We left with a better understanding of how and why a researcher working on a bird exhibit, for example, may want to access the rare books in the Cullman Library.

There were a few surprising learnings as well. I did not anticipate the stark separation between the Smithsonian and the Smithsonian Libraries. They really are separate units and seem to operate in very distinct silos. Additionally, as an arm of the federal government, the pace to make decisions (not by individuals, but rather the organization) is quite slow and bureaucratic.

I also enjoyed the opportunity to meet other participants in the LIS program and we spent an entire day on the weekend together touring the monuments on the mall. That was an incredible experience to see the monuments up close and personally. The tagline for Smithsonian Libraries is "advancing knowledge at home and around the world." I am thankful to the University of Kentucky MLIS program and Smithsonian Libraries for the opportunity to advance my own knowledge during the Alternative Spring Break program.

Although I only spent one week with the Smithsonian Libraries in Washington, D.C., participating in the University of Kentucky's 2017 Alternative Spring Break program was truly a life and career altering experience. The work, environment, and opportunities provided me with fresh insight into my current job and encouraged me to seek additional training and education for future endeavors.

As an intern for the Smithsonian Libraries, I supported the education division's [I See Wonder](#) project. Hosted through the [Smithsonian Learning Lab](#), this initiative connects teachers and students of all ages with digitized images from the Smithsonian's vast collections to encourage questioning, critical thinking, and discussion. Images are grouped into cross-curricular sets, and each image includes a brief paragraph to provide context. I spent time researching, revising, and editing the text connected to each image to ensure accuracy and cohesion within the collection and to incorporate hyperlinks for additional information and further research. Because the project is still undergoing beta testing, changes I made to the collection have not yet been applied to the public site; however, simply being involved in the editing stage revealed the intricacies of the workflow procedures and highlighted the need for collaboration among identified users, the project supervisor, and the technical services team.

One of my minor assignments was to assist with the Smithsonian Libraries' monthly Indoor Recess program, which provides a means of networking and engagement among various museum and library professionals in the Washington, D.C. area. During their lunch hour, participants travel to one of the area institutions to learn about a unique collection or item and to complete a related art project. Although this single, one-hour session provided me a glimpse into the library-related work at various organizations, it more importantly served as a reminder of the immense impact that museums, archives, and libraries have on people's lives.

During my time at the Smithsonian Libraries, I also gained a better understanding of how the libraries support the research and education efforts of the larger Smithsonian Institution. In-depth tours and discussions with the librarians at the Joseph F. Cullman 3rd Library of Natural History and the Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology provided insight into not only the history of printing and bookbinding but also the importance of publishing and documenting scientific discoveries. Having the opportunity to tour the book conservation annex and digitization lab also allowed me to learn more about the specific processes involved in preserving materials for future access and creating digital versions to minimize exposure and facilitate learning worldwide. These tours encouraged me to seek training, workshops, and other opportunities that will allow me to be more involved in preservation and digitization projects.

Being a distance learning student who also works full time as a school librarian means that I cannot take advantage of many of the wonderful programs available to students on campus, but the Alternative Spring Break program provided me an accessible way to gain invaluable experience and training at one of the nation's leading research institutions without having to leave my position. I am truly grateful to the University of Kentucky and the Smithsonian Libraries for providing me the opportunity to participate in such an outstanding program that has already had an impact on my career.

Kelly Thompson
University of Kentucky
Smithsonian Libraries Education Division Intern

Jennifer Valentine

Alternative Spring Break 2017 Reflection

I had the pleasure of spending Spring Break 2017 interning at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, D.C. I spent the week interning with the staff photographer, Jeff Reed, working on updating the keyword taxonomy used to better describe and eventually search for photographs taken at the Archives. These photographs document varied activities such as construction of new exhibits, visiting lecturers, film screenings and kids' sleepovers. Eventually, future interns will be able to correctly tag photographs with the appropriate keyword so that employees of the Archives will be able to locate specific types of photographs.

In addition to a meet and greet with the Archivist of the United States, David Ferriero, and an in-depth tour of the Archives, my mentor took me on an amazing tour of Archives II in College Park, Maryland. I was very impressed with all that NARA does with their budget. I was shown the audio-visual lab where they take analog sound and video recordings and digitize them for posterity. The photograph lab where they repair, digitize and preserve historic photographs some of which are portraits of President Lincoln on glass plates. Finally, we took a tour of the conservation lab which was the most beautiful combination of science lab and art studio. Both Archives I and II have research rooms available to researchers once they register with the organization. The research rooms are very well appointed and allow researchers access to our history.

I was invited to sit in on a panel discussion celebrating 50 years of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The presentation was arranged by NARA's Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) and included a dialogue between the Archivist of the United States and the Librarian of Congress, Dr. Carla Hayden. What I took away from that conversation was what Dr. Hayden had to say about librarians and other information professionals. She said that our job is to connect people to the information that they need.